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is the largest in
National Park
Service history."*

*"When history is written, the Centennial Initiative will be second
only to the creation of the National Park System itself."
- Mary Bomar, National Park Service Director*

PLANNING UPDATE

Volume 32

October 2007

Dear Yosemite Friends,



It's an exciting time for the National Park Service. In 40 listening sessions across the country, the agency went to people of the United States and asked them for their ideas on how to make the parks great for the next hundred years. We received 6,000 comments and the universal message was that parks need bold goals, clear objectives, specific strategies, and increased and accountable public and private

investment. The Centennial Initiative, a plan to usher our national parks into their 100th year anniversary in 2016, was born out of these listening sessions. The Centennial Initiative proposes to increase park base funds for operations as well as match philanthropic cash donations with federal funds through a program called the Centennial Challenge.

On August 23, Dirk Kempthorne, the Secretary of the Interior joined the National Park Service Director Mary Bomar at Yosemite National Park to unveil eligible projects for the Centennial Challenge. Over 200 proposals service-wide were certified eligible for Centennial Challenge private/public match for fiscal year 2008 after extensive reviews. I'm proud to announce that Yosemite National Park had 17 proposals certified eligible for federal matching funds. Additionally, we stand to gain a \$3 million increase in base funds that will include increased funding for 86 new seasonal rangers.

This proposed budget is the largest in National Park Service history. Having been personally involved in heading up the Centennial office in Washington D.C. for 6 weeks, I embrace this effort to improve our national heritage and firmly believe that we are beginning a new era for national parks.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Tollefson
Park Superintendent

Planning in the Park

Plans underway include:

- Tuolumne River and Tuolumne Meadows Plans
- New Merced River Plan/EIS
- Tunnel View Plan
- Parkwide Comprehensive Transportation Plan/EIS

Plans about to commence include:

- El Portal Design Guidelines

Upcoming Document Reviews & Comment Periods

Hetch Hetchy Communications System

Upgrade Project: Public review and comment period on the Environmental Assessment/Initial Study will occur October 2-November 2, 2007. See back page for info on viewing or requesting a copy.

Tunnel View Overlook Rehabilitation: Public scoping was held from June 4 until July 9. Scoping comments are posted at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/tunnelview.htm. Public review and comment period on the Environmental Assessment will occur October 3-November 2, 2007.

Parkwide Invasive Plant Management Plan:

Public review and comment period on the Environmental Assessment anticipated in winter 2007-2008.

Parkwide Comprehensive Transportation

Plan/EIS: Public scoping anticipated in winter 2007-2008. (see article, page 4)

Environmental Education Campus:

Resource studies for the alternative sites are nearly complete. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared this fall; Public review is anticipated for late winter 2007-2008

Project Updates

Reconstructing Critically Eroded Sections of

El Portal Road: Public review and comment period on the Environmental Assessment was held from June 4 until July 3. Comments are posted at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/leproad.htm. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was signed on July 20, 2007. It can be viewed online at the above web address. Construction is currently underway. Project completion anticipated in May, 2008.

Hodgdon Meadow Trailer Replacement Project:

Public review and comment period on the Environmental Assessment was held from July 16 until August 15. Comments are posted at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/hodgdon.htm. A Finding of No Significant Impact was signed on September 7, 2007. Construction is anticipated to begin November 6, 2007 pending weather conditions and final design submittal.

Glacier Point Road Rehabilitation: Public review and comment period on the Environmental Assessment was held from June 27 until July 29. A decision document is currently being prepared, with construction planned for late spring 2008.

Museum Masterplan: Planning for the Yosemite Valley Museum continues. Conceptual alternatives will be shared with the public at the November 28, 2007 Open House in Yosemite Valley.

THE CENTENNIAL CHALLENGE: GEARING UP FOR 2016



Secretary of Interior Dirk Kempthorne unveils over 200 certified projects

On August 23, Secretary of Interior Dirk Kempthorne and National Park Service Director Mary Bomar convened in Yosemite to announce almost \$370 million of proposals with \$215.9 million of partner matching fund commitments for Fiscal Year 2008. As proposed in the President's 2008 budget, the Centennial Initiative contains

a potential \$3 billion funding increase for the national park system. The President has already proposed \$1 billion over 10 years, above existing budgets, be spent on park operations. He also called for Americans to donate \$1 billion over 10 years to the National Park Service to be matched by up to \$1 billion from a special centennial account. A process for selecting proposals to fund will be finalized after Congress approves a centennial challenge bill and provides money for the centennial challenge account.

The five over-arching National Park Centennial goals are:

- **Stewardship.** The National Park Service leads America and the world in preserving and restoring treasured resources.
- **Environmental leadership.** The National Park Service demonstrates environmental leadership to the world.
- **Recreational experience.** National parks are superior recreational destinations where visitors have fun, explore nature and history, find inspiration, and improve health and wellness.
- **Education.** The National Park Service fosters exceptional learning opportunities that connect people to parks.
- **Professional excellence.** The National Park Service demonstrates management excellence worthy of the treasures entrusted to our care.

More information about the Centennial Challenge is available online at www.nps.gov/2016.



Half Dome sets the stage for an interview with National Park Service Director Mary Bomar

THE VISION FOR YOSEMITE

As part of the Centennial Challenge, each park was asked to complete a local implementation strategy. The following Yosemite National Park Vision Statement accompanied those performance goals:

“ Yosemite National Park will help shape the future of parks and protected areas worldwide. Uniquely positioned by both geography and renown, Yosemite will play a leadership role in reconnecting the changing face of America and the broader global community with the meaning and value of our shared heritage. Yosemite will participate in reclaiming the role of America’s national park system as a worldwide leader in conservation, exchanging best practices with protected areas throughout the world, using multiple international sister park relationships to foster an international dialogue in conservation and heritage preservation.

Situated in the nation’s most populous and diverse state, Yosemite is within a day’s drive of every major urban area in California and is experienced by more than 3.5 million visitors annually. In programs and facilities, the park will be accessible to visitors from every background, and will model principles of sustainability. Just as Yosemite’s grand landscapes inspired citizen-leaders to create the national park system, the park will participate in forging a 21st century constituency passionately engaged in the future of national parks.

Together with our partners, Yosemite will be integral to the region’s educational system. We will employ new media to capture the imagination of a new generation of learners, applying modern technologies in communicating traditional values, and reversing the trend of an increasing divide between the young and the natural world. We will provide quality educational experiences to people of all ages, fostering lifelong learning.

As a partner in stewardship responsibility over one of the largest contiguous designated Wilderness in the lower 48 states, Yosemite will engage in habitat restoration at the landscape level. We will work in concert with other Sierra land managers to foster a healthy Sierra Nevada ecosystem and ensure an enduring wilderness legacy.

Remembering that living cultures are a critical part of the region’s legacy, we will strengthen connections with tribal people affiliated with Yosemite.

Our vision for 2016 can be realized with our strongest assets: the men and women of Yosemite, and the partners who work side by side with us. National parks benefit from a passionate workforce, and the success of our Centennial vision hinges on a commitment to keeping our workforce vital. Yosemite will recruit and retain a workforce that reflects the face of America, drawn from the best and brightest. We will ensure our employees operate in a strong safety culture. We will provide employees with the tools and training to advance professionally and accomplish the mission. Similarly, Yosemite will nurture existing partners and seek to continuously broaden our partner base to effectively meet the needs of a growing nation in our most important arenas: stewardship, education, environmental leadership, and recreational experience. ”

What does the Centennial mean for Yosemite?

Yosemite stands to gain a \$3 million increase in base funds which will include increased funding for 86 new seasonal rangers in 2008. Additionally, Yosemite National Park had 17 proposals certified eligible for Centennial Challenge private/public match for fiscal year 2008. The following is a list of projects that Yosemite National Park may look forward to in the future:

- Connect Underserved Youth to Parks and Evaluate the Success of the Program
- Create Multilingual Junior Ranger Books
- Foster a Diverse Workforce through Innovative University Internships
- Yosemite’s Untold Stories: Establish Multi-Cultural Field Seminars
- Establish a Junior Ranger Program at Happy Isles Nature Center
- Time Travelers: Establish Volunteer-based Archeological Site Stewardship
- Engage Visitors in Protecting Meadow Songbirds
- Restore Ecological Integrity and Scenic Vistas through Invasive Plant Control
- Restore Critical Riparian Habitat and Braided River Corridor at Greenemeyer Sand Pit
- Preserve the Great Gray Owl
- Restore Wawona Meadow Habitat and Historic Features
- Create a Signature Yosemite Institute Environmental Education Campus
- Rehabilitate Yosemite’s Iconic Tunnel View Overlook
- Rehabilitate and Enhance Half Dome Overlook on Big Oak Flat Road
- Replace Entrance Signs and Parking at Big Oak Flat and South Entrances
- Reconstruct Trailhead Parking Areas on Tioga Road
- Rehabilitate Premier Visitor Use Trails



Proposed project for 2008: Rehabilitate Yosemite’s Iconic Tunnel View Overlook (photo circa 1932)

Merced River Plan Litigation Update

On May 11, 2007, a diverse group of seven leading conservation and recreational organizations announced they have taken legal action supporting the National Park Service's appeal to uphold the 2005 *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan & Environmental Impact Statement*, a plan on hold since a District Court ruling in 2006. The group of supporters includes The Wilderness Society, California Trout, Access Fund, The American Alpine Club, The Yosemite Fund, Friends of the River, and the National Parks Conservation Association.

This group filed a "*Friends of the Court*" brief in the U.S. Court of Appeals (9th Circuit) in San Francisco, pointing out concerns in a November 2006 District Court ruling that halted several important habitat restoration, trail repair, traffic relief, and campground expansion projects. These projects will protect both the natural habitat and visitor access while significantly shrinking the overall human footprint in the Merced River corridor, which includes Yosemite Valley.

The primary issue at stake in the National Park Service appeal is "user capacity." This has far-reaching implications—not only for Yosemite, but for all National Park Service, Wild and Scenic River managers, and federal land management agencies as a whole.

BREAKING NEWS: The appeal for the 2005 *Merced River Plan* was scheduled to be heard in the San Francisco U.S. Court of Appeals (9th Circuit) on October 10, 2007, but because of a court scheduling conflict, the National Park Service has just been informed that the hearing date will be rescheduled. In the meantime, the National Park Service has been mandated to complete a new Merced River Plan, scheduled to be completed in 2009 (see *article on page 5*). Stay tuned for updates.

TRAFFIC JAMS & PARK PLANS

Over the 4th of July weekend, Yosemite's Chief of Planning, Linda Dahl, led a team of NPS transportation and visitor experience experts with the goal of getting stuck in traffic. They toured Valley and Tioga parking lots, rode the shuttle buses, observed crowding at primary destinations including trailheads, and talked to visitors and traffic safety personnel. The purpose of this exercise was to understand how the existing transportation system is operating and how it is affecting visitors and park resources. Information gathered both that weekend and through an ongoing study funded by the Federal Transit Administration is being used to build a scope of work for a new Comprehensive Transportation Management Plan for Yosemite.

Park staff and stakeholders have been "down this road" before. Large scale changes to transportation systems contemplated in previous plans were designed to deal with projected visitation growth that has not yet materialized. However, park managers are still concerned about the potential for crowding and resource impacts. The park is defining the problems of today in order to develop solutions that are practical and feasible both in the short term and beyond. These may include wider use of intra-park shuttles, modifying parking, and better communications with visitors and tour companies about trip planning and current conditions. Internal scoping is underway. Public scoping will follow this fall and early winter.



Parking, shuttle systems and circulation patterns will all be analyzed in the transportation plan



OUTSTANDINGLY REMARKABLE VALUES OF THE MERCED RIVER

When planning for a Congressionally designated Wild and Scenic river like the Merced, the process begins by defining the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs). ORVs are the foundational element in a river management plan, meaning they set the stage for what needs to be protected and enhanced along the river and its immediate environment. ORVs for the Merced River include Geologic and Hydrological Processes, as well as Scenic, Biologic, Cultural, and Recreational values.

A two-pronged criteria must be satisfied in order for a process, habitat, experience, object, or value to be considered "outstandingly remarkable." River values must be both **1) river-related/river-dependant (i.e., it owes its existence to the river);** and **2) rare, unique or exemplary on a regional or national context.**

Decision-making about how to manage the river and its immediate environment must flow directly from these ORVs. Land-use classification will be identified in the Merced River Plan, which will describe the desired conditions for a given area in terms of how the ORVs will be protected and enhanced. While a river must only possess one ORV to be designated as a Wild and Scenic River, the Merced River has numerous ORVs which can result in tensions between two different ORVs.

The public scoping period for the new Merced River Plan ran from March 30 until June 9, 2007. Public comments received during the 2007 scoping period and the two previous scoping periods in 1999 and 2004 will inform ORV selection for the new Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management



Participants gathered at a public comment meeting for the Merced River in Mariposa

Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. Scoping comments can be viewed on the park's web site at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/planning.htm.

In the months to come, the National Park Service will continue to consult with other river management agencies and tribes to prepare a Draft ORV Report that will be available in winter 2008, and a Public Planning Workshop will be scheduled to focus on refining the ORVs.



Elected officials, scientific experts, other river management agencies, and the park planning team convened at an ORV workshop on August 16, 2007.



PLANNING IN TUOLUMNE: CONNECTIONS IN THE FIELD

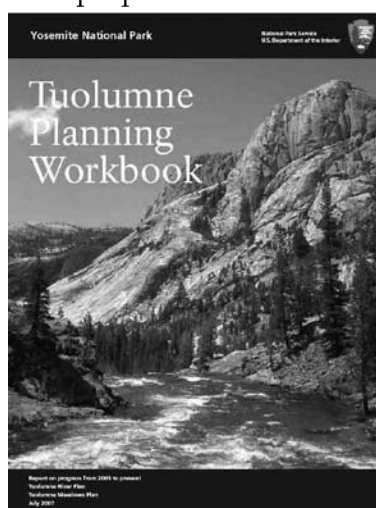


*Planner-for-a-day workshop group discussions
in Tuolumne on August 11*

Looking Ahead In Tuolumne

- **OCTOBER:** The team enters into the alternatives development process, freshly informed with input from the summer's Tuolumne Planning Workbook comment period.
- **WINTER-SPRING 2008:** Planning team begins planning for the Tuolumne Meadows Plan, with more opportunities for public participation. Details to be announced.

It has been an incredible summer in Yosemite and a fantastic opportunity for the Tuolumne River planning team to get out into the river corridor and talk with members of the public about their passion for Tuolumne. On August 11, the latest PLANNER-FOR-A-DAY workshop was held in Tuolumne Meadows at Parsons Lodge. A group of approximately 60 people took the time to participate and provide some excellent feedback on our process and the preliminary concepts presented in the Tuolumne Planning Workbook.



The Tuolumne Planning Workbook is a compilation of all work completed on this planning process to date. While release of the draft EIS for the Tuolumne River Plan and Tuolumne Meadows Plan will not occur until summer 2009, the NPS provided this workbook as a progress report and to seek additional comments from interested members of the public. This was a new step for planning in Yosemite, inspired by members of the public who asked

for opportunities to provide input on park plans DURING the plan's development. The Tuolumne Planning Workbook contains draft descriptions of Tuolumne River values, prescriptions for future management, and preliminary concepts for where and how these management prescriptions could be applied. The workbook can be viewed online at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/planning.htm.

This summer, the team has also been out and about in the river corridor. From the Lyell Fork and Dana Fork headwaters, to Glen Aulin and the river as it flows into Hetch Hetchy, the team has been holding in-the-field work sessions to discuss planning issues and conditions on-the-ground. This has been time well spent in consultation with other NPS subject-matter experts, scientists, resource specialists, and operations staff.



The planning team takes to the field: Lyell Fork Cascade, the team, and White Cascade

THE FIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN: AN IMPLEMENTATION CASE STUDY

The snowpack in Yosemite this year was only 30-40% of the normal by the end of April, which meant less melted snow flowed into the Tuolumne and Merced River drainages in spring and summer. Meanwhile, in June, the Valley's average temperature was 85.5°F—4° above normal. Fire managers prepared for increased wildfire risk due to the hot and dry conditions, but luckily catastrophic fires never materialized.

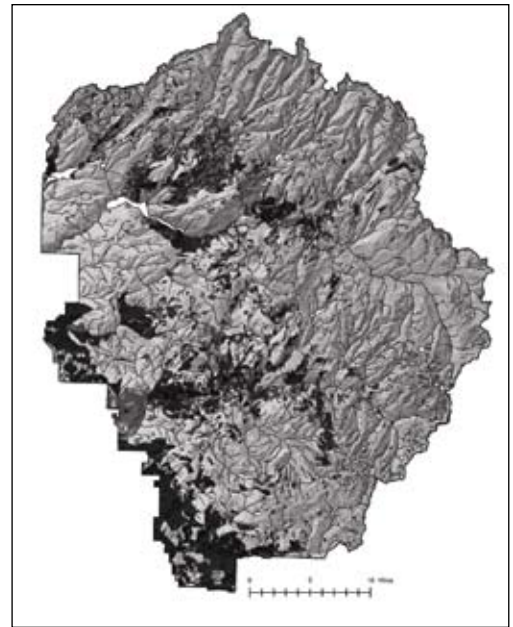
How do park staff at Yosemite manage fire? The *Yosemite National Park Final Fire Management Plan* completed in March 2004 details how fire will be managed throughout the park. Location of fires, wind, humidity, temperature and availability of fire resources all factor into management decisions. Both the Superintendent and Chief Ranger also weigh in.

This past summer, park managers made extensive use of a tool called **Wildland Fire Use**. In Wildland Fire Use, naturally-ignited fires are allowed to burn under strictly monitored conditions for ecological resource benefits. From May to September, ten lightning-ignited fires were allowed to burn in the cooler, high elevation locations of Yosemite. Allowing the fire to burn helps some species reproduce and thins out overgrown and dead vegetation—which prevents a more high intensity fire in the future if the dead overgrowth was allowed to accumulate.

Sometimes a fire *shouldn't* be allowed to burn. **Fire Suppression** remains an important part of the park's fire management program. Because of the summer drought conditions, there were increased fire suppression zones in the park, especially in the frontcountry and in the Wildland Urban Interface—areas where developed communities and structures border wildland areas. All fires within a fire suppression zone are put out. Two lightning-ignited fires were suppressed this summer because they were inside the "suppression zone." Additionally, all human-caused fires are aggressively suppressed, and one fire that was initially allowed to burn was later suppressed due to the cumulative effect of fires on air quality throughout the state.

Another tool used this summer was **Prescribed Fire**. Prescribed Fires are prepared in advance, have specific objectives, and are set and maintained only under precise conditions. Besides resource benefits, prescribed fire creates defensible space. A fire may be prescribed in an area that hasn't burned at its normal naturally-occurring cycle in order to prevent a more destructive fire later. Prescribed fires are conducted only when impacts to air quality can be minimized. This summer, there were three prescribed fires in Yosemite Valley and one in Wawona. Another prescribed fire is currently being planned for October in the Yosemite West area of the park. This fire is planned to be 750 acres, and completes a several-year long process of creating defensible space around the Yosemite West community. **Mechanical thinning** has been employed to remove dead trees and overgrown areas, especially along roads and in the Wildland Urban Interface. Park managers combined this approach with Prescribed Fire to create more defensible space.

The continuing goal of the National Park Service remains to protect lives, property, and resources while restoring fire's role as a dynamic and necessary process in maintaining healthy ecosystems. More information is available on the park website at www.nps.gov/yose/fire.



The black areas of this map represent locations in Yosemite that are of special concern for fire. These have gone the longest time without burning and as a result have an excess of overgrown vegetation and dead trees.

In Brief

No Entrance Fee Increase for 2008

The park entrance fee rate increase was scheduled to go from \$20 to \$25 per vehicle in January 2008. Thanks to input from the public, the entrance fee will not increase in 2008.

Planning Website

The Yosemite planning website is experiencing a redesign to unify the look of all NPS web pages. This consistency will make navigating National Park Service websites more user-friendly. The new address is www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/planning.htm. The old site www.nps.gov/yose/planning will redirect you to the correct page. There may be occasional difficulties in accessing the site during the transition. If you experience difficulty and want to request a document, email yose_planning@nps.gov.

Public participation is essential for the success of park projects. Other ways to stay informed and involved include attending monthly public Open Houses, signing up for the e-newsletter, requesting documents and fact sheets, and submitting comments by mail or email (see *contact info on back page panel*).

Sign up for the Yosemite
Electronic Newsletter by emailing
Yose_planning@nps.gov



STAY INVOLVED!

Copies of planning documents are available on the park's website at **www.nps.gov/parkmgmt/planning.htm**. You can also subscribe to the electronic newsletter by emailing Yose_planning@nps.gov—this e-newsletter announces when new documents are available. Please help the National Park Service economize by accessing documents online when possible. If you would like to receive a copy of planning documents for review, please check the boxes that apply. If you have already requested one of these documents, you do not need to submit another request.

- Hetch Hetchy Communications System Upgrade Project EA/IS ☐ CD ☐ Hard Copy
- Tunnel View Overlook Rehabilitation Project ☐ CD ☐ Hard Copy
- Parkwide Invasive Plant Management Plan ☐ CD ☐ Hard Copy
- Environmental Education Campus ☐ CD ☐ Hard Copy

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